

The View and Understanding of Yugoslavia on the Korean War: an Analysis through Illustrations*

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Abstract

Yugoslavia was always afraid of Soviet and its bloc's invasion by military power after Cominform(Informbiro) conflict in 1948. So, Korean War in 1950. has received as very important international occasion to Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia conceived Korean War as a collision between the West and the East, and started to analyze why occurred this collision in Korean peninsula instead of Balkan (Yugoslavia) which has been understood as peak of the Cold War.

In this study, on the basis of such backgrounds, I explained the view and understanding of Yugoslavia on the Korean War from the view point through illustrations in newspaper of Yugoslavia.

Among the various themes related to the problems of Korea and the Korean War in the illustrations, I focused on the following three points in this paper; First, Yugoslavia understands the origins of the division of the Korean peninsula and the Korean War such as a kind of Cold War caused by hegemonic policies of Super Powers; Second, Yugoslavia analyses the Korean War as an attack of North Korea on South Korea with the Soviet Union-made weapons; Third, Yugoslavia holds the view that the UN-led peace settlement rather than Power Game between Super Powers is necessary to end the Korean War and build peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Key Words : Korean War, Yugoslavia, Illustration, Cold War, UN

I. Introduction

After the Second World War, the tensions between the two blocs of the America and the Soviet Union were sharply increasing in international societies. Those days the conflict between the America and the Soviet Union over the solution of the problems in the Korean Peninsula were not the concerns of the

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Korean people alone but one of numerous international problems. The outbreak of the Korean War in June, 1950, in particular, was the touchstone of the UN for its leadership. Meanwhile in European countries, Yugoslavia, which was separated from Soviet and socialist bloc after the conflict of Cominform(*Informbiro*) in 1948, was one of the important international issues along with the problems of East and West Germany.

At that time, Yugoslavia and Tito had strong national pride because Yugoslavia was the only country in Eastern Europe which, during the Second World War, succeeded to make a socialist state by Partisans without the aids of the Soviet Union. However, Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, tried to keep the whole of Eastern Europe including Yugoslavia under its control, and this caused the conflict between Tito and Stalin. In 1948, the Soviet Union ousted Yugoslavia from Cominform by force, and after that Yugoslavia had political, economic, and diplomatic difficulties, and faced the risk of being attacked by the Soviet Union and the members of Warsaw Pact. But, the war broke out in June, 1950 in the Korean peninsula. Right after the breakout of the Korean War, Yugoslavia made it clear that North Korea started the war by attacking South Korea with the military support from Soviet Union, unlike other socialist countries that claimed that the war broke out by the attack of South Korea on North Korea. Such opinions of Yugoslavia appeared in the official newspaper of Party *Politika*, *Borba* and various diplomatic documents. Yugoslavia, who was making an analysis of the Korean War, came to the conclusion that the Soviet Union started the testing war on the Korean peninsula to see how the America and UN would react in the case that the Soviet Union invades Yugoslavia and Europe.

On the basis of such backgrounds, this study will deal with the theme of “the View and Understanding of Yugoslavia on the Korean War: an Analysis through Illustrations”. Among the various themes related to the problems of Korea and the Korean War in the illustrations, I will focus on the following three points in this article. In addition, on the basis of the three points to be mentioned, I will make an analysis of the understanding and the view of Yugoslavia on the Korean War and the situations at that time using the illustrations.

First, Yugoslavia understands the origins of the division of the Korean peninsula and the Korean War such as a kind of Cold War caused by hegemonic policies of Super Powers.

Second, Yugoslavia analyses the Korean War as an attack of North Korea on South Korea with the Soviet Union-made weapons.

Third, Yugoslavia holds the view that the UN-led peace settlement rather than Power Game between Super Powers is necessary to end the Korean War and build peace on the Korean Peninsula.

II. The Origin of the Division of the Korean Peninsula and the Korean War: The Cold War and Policy of Super Power's Hegemony

Before and after the Korean War, the situation of international politics had the following two characteristics. The first one is the extension of the Cold War between the America and the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, both the America and the Soviet Union were having invisible conflicts and tensions in order to win over to their side the countries which were not aligned to either bloc. The second characteristic is the helplessness of the UN and other international organizations caused by the Soviet Union's boycott. The Soviet Union claimed to the international society that Communist China, which won the war in China mainland in October 1949, should be a permanent member of the UN Security Council instead of Taiwan. However, America and the West, fearing the extension of the Soviet bloc, did not accept this request. Because of this refusal, the Soviet Union did not participate in any of the meetings held by the UN organization since January in 1950.¹

At that time, the government of Yugoslavia gave an analysis that ascribes the problems of Korea and the Korean War to the Cold War caused by Power Game of Super Powers and the subsequent helplessness of the UN. The conflicts over the entry of Communist China into the UN and the permanent membership in the UN Security Council are the incidents that proved the helplessness of the UN. Yugoslavia criticized the America and the Soviet Union, though they both strongly argue for the necessity of world peace and reinforcement of the roles of the UN, they are rather trying to expand their interest sphere. Namely, Yugoslavia insisted that "the entry of a Communist China into the UN is not the matter of other countries but the matter of a Communist China itself, which is a sovereign state, nevertheless the Soviet Union was trying to show off its influential power by controlling this matter regardless of a Communist China's intention." According to the Yugoslavia's opinion, America, on the other hand, fearing the extension of the

Soviet bloc, only criticized the Soviet Union did not recognize the diplomatic sovereignty of the Chinese people. Therefore, in the following Yugoslavian literature both America and the Soviet Union are described as pursuing hegemonic policies.²

Figure 1 : The Understanding of Yugoslavian Literature on Hegemonic Policies of Super Powers³



Yugoslavian literature analyzes that the Cold War, caused by the struggles for international political power and the helplessness of UN, had an influence on the division of the Korean Peninsula. In other words, the America and the Soviet Union, advancing into the Korean Peninsula around the end of the Second World War, tried to build their interest spheres by dividing it at the 38th parallel of latitude, but the UN failed to put through the opinions of the Korean people in this matter. As a result, contrary to the wishes of the Korean people for unification, the Korean Peninsula was divided into two parts: South Korea under the influence of the America, and North Korea under the influence of the Soviet Union. With regard to this, William Stueck noted that the division and occupation of the Korean Peninsula was carried out without power countries specifying the occupation period and making promise of the unified government, and this was the cause for the permanent division of the Korean Peninsula and the Korean War.⁴

With regard to this, Đ. Radenković and D. Stojiljković criticized ‘the policy of the Divide and Rule’ caused by the theory of Cold War, mentioning that as the Korean Peninsula was divided by America and the Soviet Union, South Korea and North Korea were each put under the control of the West and the East, and furthermore degraded to pawn(*pion*) for the strategic activities of countries which have participated in the Cold War.⁵

Figure 2: The Opinions of Yugoslavia on the Division of the Korean Peninsula in the Illustrations⁶



III. The Outbreak of the Korean War : the Invasion of North Korea on South Korea with the Soviet Union’s Weapons

Right after the beginning of the Korean War, the governments of the Soviet Union and North Korea set forth such justification for a war that North Korea made an attack against the offensive of South Korea. According to the literature of Yugoslavia, North Korea claimed, in a report which sent to the European countries to justify going to war against South Korea, that the Korean army invaded the territory of North Korea several times crossing the 38th parallel after 1949, and that the government of North Korea warned the government of South Korea several

times that they would make a large scale counter attack unless South Korea immediately stops that's invasion against North Korea. According to the official report of the government of North Korea expressed in News Agency of *Tass*, the army of North Korea successfully drove back the attack of the army of South Korea that crossed the 38th parallel on June 25 in 1950, stopped the army of South Korea from advancing into the territory of North Korea, and attempted a successful counterattack. Also, Kim Il-Seong, a dictator of the North Korea, urged the justification of the war, saying on the radio "We are repulsing the containment offensive of the army of South Korea and marched on into South Korea. The aim of the attack of North Korea on South Korea is to pull down the feudal government of South Korea under the rule of Ree Sung-Man and achieve the complete unification of the Korean Peninsula."⁷

With regard to the outbreak of the Korean War, the Soviet Union and most of East European countries were willing to agree with the argument of North Korea. However, Yugoslavia, from the beginning of the Korean war, tried to take an objective view of the war. *Politika* and *Borba*, which are national official newspaper of Yugoslavia, and *Tanjug*, which is state-run news agency, remarks about the outbreak of the Korean War, "According to the foreign news agency, this morning(on June 25, 1950) the army of North Korea attacked South Korea crossing the 38th parallel which was demarcated by the America and the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, a few hours later, Radio Pyongyang announced that Democratic People's Republic of Korea officially reported that the counterattack was made because of the military provocation of South Korea, and thus the government of South Korea should assume the whole responsibility for the war."⁸

However, the secret government document about the outbreak of the Korean War, written by Edvard Kardelj, who was the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia on June 28, 1950, showed that Yugoslavia recognized the Korean War was started by the attack of North Korea on South Korea. Kardelj, in a document revealed to members of Cabinet, insisted, "Judging from all the signals of the military collisions in Korea, it can be assumed that the Russian people prepared for the war for a long time, and the army of North Korea struck South Korea first, contrary to the allegations of North Korea and the Soviet Union. The reason for such opinions is that the army of South Korea, which was alleged to strike first, becomes powerless too easily against the counterattack of North Korea."⁹

Peko Dapcević, who analyzed tactics and strategies of the army of North Korea during the Korean War, went one step further from the predictions of the

government of Yugoslavia and emphasized that the army of North Korea struck the army of South Korea first. On the basis of secret collection of information in the Soviet Union, he announced that the Korean War was started on June 25, 1950 with the large scale attack from the army of North Korea and that North Korea established strategies to conquer South Korea through three steps. The first step was to conquer Seoul, the capital of South Korea, and divide battle grounds into two parts using the Han River and Geum river as boundary lines. The second step was to conquer Daejeon, the central part of middle areas, after gaining control of Seoul and nearby areas. Lastly, the third step was conquering all areas of South Korea including Jeju island, surrounding islands, and coastal areas.¹⁰ Actually the army of North Korea went up to the second step with irresistible force, and made efforts to occupy Busan in the battle of Nakdong river.

Figure 3: The Standpoint of Yugoslavia on the allegation of the Soviet Union¹¹



According to other Yugoslavian literature, it was mentioned that the Soviet Union offered food and military weapons to North Korea prior to the Korean War and that the attack on South Korea by North Korea was similar to the attack on Yugoslavia by the German Army and the attack on Hawaii by the Japanese army in the Second World War.¹² Milan Marković strongly criticized the claim that the war was not started by North Korea, saying “Despite the claims by North Korea and the Soviet Union that America and South Korea had planed to attack North Korea, we could not find any hard evidence to back up the claim. On the contrary, according to the report of UNTCOK,¹³ we can convinced that the army of North Korea prepared for war for a long time and started Korean war first.”¹⁴

Actually Yugoslavia was not aligned to any of the blocs in the Korean War, so it was possible for Yugoslavian experts to analyze this matter on an objective basis. On the basis of this, Yugoslavia made it clear that the Korean War was started by an attack of North Korea on South Korea with the aid of the Soviet Union. Such analysis of Yugoslavia turned out to be apparently true through the secret document on the Korean War which delivered to the former President Kim Young-Sam in South Korea from Boris Yeltsin in Russia in June 1994. According to this document, the Soviet Union proved to be deeply involved in the Korean War even before the war. In addition, after Mao Ze-Dong had won the battle in the Chinese mainland, Kim Il-Sung was promised to get support from Stalin and Mao Ze-Dong. And this made essential backgrounds for Kim Il-Sung to attack South Korea.

IV. The End of the Korean War and the Establishment of Peace on the Korea: UN-led settlement of Peace

After that the American army failed to go northward crossing the 38th parallel line, the Chinese army began to become involved in the war and the offensive and defensive battle continued for a while, Yugoslavia began to show a high interest in the destructive result of the war. First, they worried about the possibility of a Third World War between the Powers of the Cold War and about the possibility of the reuse of the atomic bomb, which was already used in the Second World War. In his personal editorial, Dušan Timotijević said, “After the Korean War, human society began to worry about the threat of the atomic bomb. But the Powers are making use of the fear of the human society for their hegemony.” He also

criticized the international organization for not making efforts for the solution and mediation of the Korean War and argued that the Minor Powers should collaborate to control the hegemony of Super Powers.¹⁵

Figure 4 : The Illustration showing the wish to end the Korean War with the agreement between Super Powers¹⁶



Yugoslavia, a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council at that time, argued for the necessity for the active involvement of the UN for the quick settlement of the Korean War and establishment of world peace. Other countries who observed the standstill between the UN army and the Chinese army also began to recognize that the Korean problems could not be solved by the military strength and power alone. Besides, the general opinions of the world were such that the UN rather than the Super Powers should be involved to solve the problems of Korea. These people claimed that the UN should play a central role to prevent aggressive military acts, including the Korean War. Yugoslavia said that the establishment of a democratic and independent United Korea could be the

foundation for world peace as well as for the peace of Korea.¹⁷ Actually the UN army, after Douglas MacArthur, who argued for a full scale war, was discharged, began to lose the strong will to continue the war. The army of North Korea and the Chinese army, after they failed in the spring's offensive in April, 1951, were not convinced that they would win the war completely. Therefore, a positive phenomenon was taking place for the end of the war and peaceful agreement, and Yugoslavia predicted that the Korean War would end with some more efforts of UN.

Figure 5: The Illustration in a Yugoslavian newspaper wishing for a quick end of the Korean War.¹⁸



It was possible to witness the wishes of Yugoslavia for the end of the Korean War and settlement of peace by the UN through the interview of Ales Bebler, who was one of the UN representatives for Yugoslavia. He said that he had a conviction that the UN should make efforts for the end of the Korean War and world peace and suggested two opinions. The first one is that the international

organization such as the UN should find a breakthrough for the end of the Korean War. The second one is to establish a future committee for the settlement of the Asian problems including the communist China and offer new vision for the peace.¹⁹

The Soviet Union, which recognized the necessity of strategic rest after the failure in Spring Offensive, suggested the truce talks for the Korean War on June 23, 1951 in UN. However, despite the agreements on various points, the talk continued for more than 2 years because of the disagreements over the exchange of prisoners. A survey to find out how many people wanted repatriation showed that about 70,000 people of the about 170,000 North Korean and Chinese prisoners captured by the UN army wanted to go home. However, the governments of North Korea and Communist China did not admit the result of the survey and claimed that all of the prisoners should be sent home. The reason why such results came out was that most of the people who do not want repatriation are enlisted soldiers taken from South Korea by force or enlisted soldiers who are against socialism in China. However, as Dwight David Eisenhower was elected President in November, 1952, who gave an election pledge that he would end the Korean War soon, and Stalin died in March, 1953, it was very likely for the Korean War to be ended.

In the long run, in April, 1953, with the mediation of UN, the countries concerned of the Korean War agreed to send the wounded war prisoners first to their countries. Afterwards, the suggestion for the whole repatriation was accepted by the UN, and the prisoners who wanted to go home were sent to their countries through Panmunjom for 2 months, and the prisoners who refused to go home were committed to the care of a neutral state committee which were composed of representatives of India, Sweden, Swaziland, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. And finally, the truce was agreed on July 27, in 1953 in Panmunjom.

V. Conclusion

Unlike communist countries which claimed to begin the Korean War such as that South Korea attacked North Korea, Yugoslavia said, right after the Korean War broke out, that North Korea started the war with the aid from Soviet Union by attacking South Korea.²⁰ Even though the Korean War took place in the Far East, it had a lot of significance and importance for Yugoslavia. The reason was that at

that time Yugoslavia was having hardships such as political, economic, and diplomatic isolation after the conflicts with the Soviet Union were started in 1948 in Cominform and threats of aggression from the members of the Warsaw Pact. Though being a socialist country, Yugoslavia received military and economic aid from the western countries such as America, UK, and France, and concluded a defense treaty with Turkey. Above all, the strong reaction from the UN and western countries prevented the Soviet Union and countries in Eastern Europe from invading Yugoslavia. Hence, the Korean War, which took place far away from Yugoslavia, meant a lot for Yugoslavia. Actually Darko Bekić, in his book *Jugoslavija u Hladnom Ratu: Odnosi sa velikim silama 1949-1955* (Yugoslavia during the Cold War: Relations with Super Powers, 1949-1955), remarked about the Korean War “*Korejski, umjesto Balkanskog rata!* (Korean War, instead of Balkan)”.²¹

After January, 1950, Yugoslavia, as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council and chair of Security Council at the time of Communist China being involved in the Korean War, made significant remarks and performed important resolutions with regard to the Korean War in the UN. And afterwards, Yugoslavia strengthened the diplomatic relations with countries such as India and Egypt which became close to because of the Korean War, and eventually established a foundation for Policy of Nonalignment with the Third World to remain a neutral country not belonging to either of the blocs.

These are the main points that I have tried to show with regard to the perspectives of Yugoslavia on the Korean War through the illustrations.

Notes

¹ Đ. Radenković, and D. Stojiljković, *Koreja*. (Beograd: Glas, 1950), pp. 23-24.

² *Međunarodna politika*, “Uz početak Pete Generalne skupštine UN”, god. I, br. 9, 27. September, (Beograd, 1950), p. 3.

³ *Politika*, godina XLIX, 24. January 1952; Kim Chul-Min, *Jugoslavija i Korejski rat*, (Beograd: Beogradski nacionalni univerzitet, 2002), p. 416.

⁴ William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1995), p. 19.

⁵ Đ. Radenković and D. Stojiljković, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

⁶ *Politika*, godina XLVIII, 15. February 1951; Kim Chul-Min, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

⁷ Milan Marković, “Neke crte međunarodno-pravnog aspekta korejskog sukoba”, *Međunarodni problemi*, br. 6, godina III, January-February, (Beograd, 1951), p. 107.

⁸ *Borba*, “Izbio je oružani sukob između Severne i Južne Koreje”, godina XV, 25. June 1950; *Politika* godina XLVII, 26. June 1950.

⁹ Darko Bekić, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom Ratu: Odnosi sa velikim silama 1949-1955*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), p. 164.

¹⁰ Peko Dapčević, *Rat u Koreji*, (Beograd, 1951), p. 11.

¹¹ *Politika*, godina XLVIII, 21. January 1951; Kim Chul-Min, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

¹² Poljoprivredni nakladni privreda, *Koreja: zemlja, narod, privreda*, (Zagreb, 1956), p. 73.

¹³ UNTOCK was established on November 14, 1957 in accordance with the request of America. The responsibilities of this committee are evacuation of foreign army, keeping watch on the election, and giving support for the peaceful unification of Korea. UNTCOK, *First part of the Report, Vol I*, (General Assembly, Official Record), pp. 43-44.

¹⁴ Milan Marković, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁵ Dušan Timotijević, "Stvaranje ratne psihoze i borba za mir", *Međunarodna Politika*, god. I, br. 3. 5 July, (Beograd, 1950), pp. 7-9.

¹⁶ *Politika*, godina XLVII, 27. August 1950; Kim Chul-Min, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

¹⁷ *Međunarodna politika*, "Komplikacije u Koreji", god. I, br. 13, 22. November, (Beograd, 1950), p. 4;

Međunarodna politika, "Kinezi u Koreji i Lejk Saksesu", god. I, br. 14, 6. December, (Beograd, 1950), p. 17.

¹⁸ *Politika*, godina XLVIII 7. January 1951; Kim Chul-Min, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

¹⁹ *Borba*, "Jačanje kolektivne bezbednosti je put ka očuvanju mira", godina XVI, Beograd, 13. Maj 1951.

²⁰ *Politika*, god. XLVII, 26. jun 1950; *Borba*, god. XV. 26. jun 1950.

²¹ Darko Bekić, *op. cit.*

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